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## THE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION OF GREEK AND LATIN PROPER NAMES<sup>1</sup>

THE title of this paper suggests the idea of some regulation or control of the pronunciation of Greek and Latin names in English. This may surprise those of you who are familiar with the teachings of modern philology and who know that I personally strongly sympathize with the doctrine that it is the business of the philologue to determine what *is* and how it came to be what it is, and not to dictate as to what *should* be. To this general truth there is, however, one exception. Not all linguistic material stands on the same footing. For example, there are words that we rarely hear except in the school-room, and the child's ideas of their sound and meaning are dependent almost entirely on the usage of his teacher. Most Greek and Latin proper names belong to this class. In the case of such words the usage of the teacher counts for much, and it is no impertinence if he strives to exert his influence for what he believes to be the norm. So much in excuse of my taking up the subject.

I have not attempted to lay down rules for the English pronunciation of Greek and Latin names, or to revise those now published. I wish simply to call attention to the present lamentable state of things and to point out the conditions that must be confronted in dealing with the problem. The pronunciation of Greek and Latin names that we hear from the lips of very many teachers and not a few scholars betrays neither cultivated traditions nor scholarly correctness. Mixtures of Roman and English pronunciations like *Africanus* with the first *a* as in *cat* and the second as in *father*, *Agamemnon* with the first *a* as in *cat* and *o* as in *no*, and *Leonidas* with *e* as in *me* and *o* as in *no*, are of everyday occurrence; forms like *Aphrodite* may be heard pronounced as though they were English forms like *Arcite*, while English forms like *Ovid* and *Herod* are pronounced *Ovid* and *Hērod* as though they were Latin forms like *Nero* and *Cronus*; even *Odyssey*, the English form of *Odysse'a*, is at times stressed *Odys'sy*, forsooth because a

<sup>1</sup> Paper by Professor George Hempl, read at the Classical Conference at Ann Arbor, March 31; see p. 438.

long penult is stressed in Latin, or possibly by analogy to *Odysseus*.<sup>1</sup> That this is a sad state of things, I think no one will deny. Aside from all other considerations, it is so unscholarly that it fosters in the student a spirit of tolerance of—yes, even a sort of respect for—easy-going slovenliness in the externals of scholarship.

Before we attack the problem of today, let us see how things have come to be as they are. The so-called English pronunciation of Latin, as taught in the older grammars, was largely a natural product; that is, it was the descendant of real Latin, and came down to us through the church and the school. Of course, a man's pronunciation of Latin was influenced by that of his native tongue. For example, when Latin *c* became *ts* before front vowels, this *ts* remained if the native tongue also had *ts*; thus, Germans to this day pronounce "Caesar" *tsäzar* and "socialis" *zotsiäl'lis*, like their own "social" = *zotsiäl'*. But if in the native tongue *t* became silent before *s*, as it did in Old French, it became silent in the local pronunciation of Latin too. Hence, the Old French not only said *Sëzar*<sup>2</sup> and *sosiäl'*, but when speaking Latin they also said *Sëzar* and *sosiäl'lis*. Our traditional Latin is derived from that of the Norman-French clergy; hence, we inherited from the French not only their way of pronouncing the Romance words that they brought us, but also their way of pronouncing Latin; that is, Chaucer and his contemporaries said *Sëzar* and *sosiäl* and *sosiälis* just as the French did. Since that time the Latin spoken in England has suffered the same changes that English has suffered; thus, *Sëzar* became *Sizer*, *sosiäl* became *soshal*, and *sosiälis* became *soshiëlis*.

But it was not only in the matter of sound changes that the Latin ran parallel with the native speech; it also adapted itself to the native usage in the matter of vowel quantity. Thus, vowels were sounded long in stressed open ultimas and penults and stressed open antepenults when penults contained weak front vowels (*e*, *i*, *y*) before hiatus, whether they were long or short in Roman times; and in most other positions vowels were sounded short, whether the Roman citizen sounded them short or long.<sup>3</sup> Thus, *bōnus* and *dōmus* for *bōnus* and *dōmus* (just as some do today, who fancy they are pro-

<sup>1</sup> Professor Seymour tells me that this pronunciation has been traditional at Yale for something like a century.

<sup>2</sup> I shall use the vowels with their Roman values.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LUICK, *Anglia*, XX, 335 ff.

nouncing as the Romans did), *gēnus* for *gēnus*, *fōrum* for *forum*, *dīversus* for *diversus*, *famīlia* for *famīlia*, *nātūra* for *nātūra*, *ēnūntisio* for *enūntio*, *fēmīna* for *fēmīna*, *cōdzito* for *cōgito*, *frīdzidus* for *frīgidus*, *egzīstimo* for *existimo*, *ēdifitsium* for *edificium* later form of *ædificium*; and so in names: *Mārius* for *Mārius*, *Mercūrius* for *Mercūrius*, *Pūblius* for *Pūblius*, *Quīntus* for *Quīntus*, *Sēquani* for *Sequani*, *Ēdui* for *Ēdui* later form of *Ædui*, *Vēnus* for *Vēnus*.

This natural development of Latin along with the development of the native tongue had, however, one or two checks. The written form of the Latin remained practically as it had always been, while the native tongue was generally written as it was pronounced. Moreover, the meter of Latin poetry and hymns did not admit of the loss of those vowels that became silent in the native tongue. There was a time when English *miles*, the plural of *mile*, was pronounced just like Latin *miles* "soldier." In English *miles* and in the English pronunciation of Latin *miles*, the long vowel *i* (cf. footnote, p. 416) regularly broke into the diphthong *ai*. The heavy Germanic stress on the first syllable, and the consequent weakness of the stress on the second syllable resulted (1) in the gradual reduction of the short *e* to an obscure *ə*, which in time became quite silent, (2) in the voicing of the unstressed *s* to *z* (Verner's law). As stated above, all these changes took place in the Latin *miles* as well as in the English *miles*; but as this deprived the Latin word of a syllable that was needed in scanning, the Latin teacher insisted on its utterance, putting a heavy secondary stress upon it and thus actually pronouncing the *e* long,<sup>1</sup> though he retained the *z* sound of *s*, which arose through the earlier natural habit of leaving the syllable quite unstressed. The same is true of words like *ales*, *manes*, etc., and of names like *Ulysses*, *Tyres*, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Names, moreover, have not quite the same linguistic lot as other words: they are often uttered by themselves and, thus, are not so often cramped in a sentence or a stress-group<sup>3</sup> by neighboring words. As a result, it is easy to put a secondary stress on a syllable that would in an ordinary word be quite unstressed. In this way, vowels that would otherwise have become obscure were often distinctly articulated.

<sup>1</sup>South Germans in whose dialect final *e* is silent, often do this very thing when trying to restore it.

<sup>2</sup>It is possible but not probable that a consciousness of the original quality of many of these *e*'s aided the pronunciation of a long vowel in English.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. my *German Orthography and Phonology*, § 93, 2, 277.

Witness such pronunciations as *Ar'gös'* and *Les'bös'* by the side of *Ar'gəs*, etc., with obscure *ə* in the last syllable.

In these and similar ways a certain conservative force was brought to bear, but it was inconsiderable. Scholars and diplomats found the national forms of Latin inconvenient, and at times tried to bring about more harmony, but with little if any success.

Thus, when Walker wrote his English dictionary, the rules he gave for the pronunciation of Latin names were such as applied with nearly equal force to English words, so far as they accorded in form with Latin words. The pronunciation of Latin was easy because the learner already knew how to pronounce a large number of Romance words of similar form; and the practice in pronouncing Latin strengthened and developed his speech-feeling for less familiar Romance words and Latin proper names. With the partial or complete introduction of the Continental or the Roman pronunciation into American, Scotch, and English schools, a new state of things has arisen. The learner is no longer taught to pronounce Latin as he does the Romance words in English and, thus, soon acquires a new feeling for Latin or Latin-looking words. As a result, when he sees an unfamiliar Latin name, or even an unfamiliar Romance word, in English, he recognizes its Latin character and is tempted to pronounce it more or less as he pronounces Latin. Being conscious that he is not reading Latin, he often makes a compromise, and we, thus, hear a pronunciation of Latin names that is partly Roman and partly English. This does not apply to those names that are familiar, for example *Caesar* and *Cicero* and *Julius*. But it does apply to such as *Cassius* for *Cashus*, *Lysias* for *Lyshas*, *Belgae* for *Beldzæ*, *Sequani* for *Sëquani*, *Helvë'tii* for *Helvë'shī*, and *Arkite* for *Arcite*.

I have heard of three means of dealing with the problem: First, we have been urged to abandon the Roman pronunciation and join our British brethren in fostering the English pronunciation. This would mean the sacrifice of much that is of the greatest importance to Latin and to comparative philology—and what for? To foster the traditional English pronunciation of Latin names. However desirable this end may be, it surely is insignificant when we consider the price we should have to pay. Moreover, would the abandonment of the Roman pronunciation secure the end sought? The scholarly considerations that led to the adoption of the Roman method of pronunciation have not been without effect upon those who still adhere

to the English pronunciation. They, too, have come to see that it is the height of folly to tell a boy that a vowel is long and then teach him to pronounce it short, or to tell him that another vowel is short but teach him to pronounce it long. They, therefore, make some effort to have boys pronounce vowels "long" if they were long in Latin—even if they stand in unstressed syllables. Their practice is very inconsistent and may be said to be fairly regular only in the case of *ae* and *oe*, whose graphic form presents a crutch for the memory to lean on. But even if the practice were quite consistent, we here have a way of pronouncing Latin that is neither Latin nor English. Because the Latin diphthongs *ae* and *oe* became *ē* and then *ī*<sup>1</sup> in words like *Caesar* and *Croesus*, this sound is now put into all words that had the diphthongs *ae* and *oe* in Latin and we hear *paēdagogus*, *paēnitentia*, and *palaēstra*, for *paëdagogus*, *paënitentia*, and *palaëstra*; and *Maēcēnus*, *Aēsches*, and *Oēdipus*, for *Mäcēnus*, *Aēsches*, and *Oēdipus*. And all this they do under the impression that they are doing something scholarly! Of course, nobody would claim that there was anything Latin about the pronunciation of *ae* as *ī*<sup>1</sup> in *Caesar*; still, there undoubtedly is genuine linguistic history back of it. But *paēdagogus*, *Aēsches*, and *Oēdipus* are simply illustrations of learned blundering; for this pronunciation of *ae* and *oe* in these positions is not only un-Roman, it is also absolutely un-English. In other words, the English pronunciation of Latin was adhered to because of its English qualities and its harmony with the natural pronunciation of Romance words in English; but, as it was found to be absurd as a system of Latin pronunciation, it was changed and thus robbed of the very qualities that constituted its only claim on our consideration. It is evident that we cannot look to such a system for aid in teaching the traditional English pronunciation of Greek and Latin names; it has, indeed, already introduced into English learned circles such absurdities as *Aēschylys* and *Oēdipus*, and, what is more, it has even tainted the pronunciation of learned English words—witness those linguistic pearls *aēsthetics* and *asafoëtida*.

The second proposition is that we employ the Roman pronunciation of classical proper names even when speaking English, just as we do with other foreign names. There is much to be said in favor of this. Against it are two arguments. In the first place, some of these

<sup>1</sup>I am here using the vowels with their Roman values; not so, however, in the examples below.

words have become a part of our language and literature, and a violent change in their pronunciation would be an unnatural and, to many, an unpleasant thing. Secondly, those persons that have not studied Latin and those that have not learned to pronounce Latin by the Roman method, would not know how to pronounce the words, and chaos would result. In reply to this, it may justly be said that we now are little short of chaos; and, whereas unlearned persons might not know how to pronounce Greek and Latin names, learned and unlearned are about equally at a loss at present. This measure would surely be an innovation and would have little hope of success unless a learned body like the American Philological Association, after careful deliberation, decided to throw the weight of its influence in its favor. The subject surely deserves the serious consideration of the association.

Under one condition the change would not only be advisable, it would be inevitable. Our trouble in sounding foreign names lies largely in the fact that we ascribe to the letters of the Roman alphabet different values from what the rest of the world does, and that we spell so inconsistently and absurdly that we have largely lost the phonetic sense and are about as ready to give a letter one sound as another. When, however, that combination of scholarship and good sense that made it possible for us to introduce the Roman method of pronouncing Latin, shall have made it possible for us to write our own tongue in a phonetic alphabet based on the Roman values of the letters, it will be a simple matter for even the most unlearned to pronounce Latin names as they are spelled. In the case of very familiar names like *Caesar* and *Cicero* we should doubtless retain the Anglicized pronunciation and use a spelling different from the Latin; just as we now do in the case of *Horace* and *Livy*. But the day of actual spelling-reform has not yet come and, thus, our problem still stares us in the face.

We have one more solution to consider. It is this: Let it be one of the strictest requirements of teachers of Latin and Greek that they be perfectly familiar with the rules that embody the traditional English pronunciation of Latin and that they personally apply them in pronouncing Greek and Latin names in speaking English. The most important of these rules they may teach their pupils, but for pupils who are not to be teachers it will generally suffice if they always hear the correct pronunciation from their teacher; for the present deplorable state of things is largely due—not to the difficulty of the subject or

the inaptitude of the pupils — but to lack of adequate teaching and to the bad example set by those who should be safe guides. The responsibility of the teacher in this matter is now much greater than it was when the traditional English pronunciation of Latin was taught.

When Latin and Greek scholars realize that the average cultivated citizen has opportunity to judge them, not by their technical knowledge of Latin and Greek, but by their pronunciation of Latin and Greek proper names when they speak English, consideration for their own good name, if not interest in the subject, will perhaps lead them to take pains to be more scholarly and less slovenly in this matter.